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Flood at the International Writer's Workshop

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His heart feels light.
Life has fallen back,
Slipping away like a deer.

So, I didn't want
To idealize him,
To number him among
The great outlaws,
To give him a place in History.
All I wanted was
To enter his mind for a moment.

August, 1974

Translated by the author with Daniel Weissbort

BOGOMIL GJUŽEL / YUGOSLAVIA

Flood at the International Writer's Workshop

Since the sky started crying
I haven't been out-of-doors for thirty-one days:
By now the earth must be a pair of pliers
With tatters of human flesh stuck to its jaws.

I imagine myself on a see-saw, balanced so lightly
That if even an atom fell on it (let alone a bomb)
I would be hurled like a stone from a catapult
Straight back into the trap of Macedonia.

My people, are we God's voracious eye
Suspended in the air like a traffic-light
Which, as it blinks, directs the flow of nations?
Right now I'm only that greedy eye of legend
Which, on my side of the scale, outweighs the world.

In the Ark, our elevators work erratically:
Every deck is bursting with trapped livestock!

On the first floor, insects have turned into neurons
Without any owners;
On the second, saurians form a mythic chain
To swallow each other so they will all disappear,
But too feeble to achieve total consummation;
On the third floor, the mad vegetarians
Roaring with hunger, lay waste the frigidares;
On the fourth, the carnivorous flowers
Make plans to devour God;
On the fifth floor, this lone Macedonian
Mangles their languages, recreating Babel.

And every line that occurs to me sinks like a plummet
When it should splash about like a happy dog
And, like a dolphin, jump through its trainer's hoop.
But I'm dense when it comes to featherweight words!
The verb should be in a state of constant erection,
In equal readiness to strike, or stroke;
The adjective sticks to the noun like a lizard catching flies;
And the noun should swing both ways,
While the conjunctive is a universal pass-key.

So the sky sobs on, like an hysterical child,
Like the she-dragons of my legends.
The gutters gurgle, and gargle.
The drain-pipes are subterranean Mississippis.

The words refuse to swallow us any longer
Now we have set them to quarrelling among themselves:
Trying to strangle each other, they bite off their tongues.
They have burned to tell us everything they know,
But, being dumb now, drooling idiots,

Speechlessly, they copulate with rainbows.